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ABSTRACT

Eighty-six instructors of business communication at four-year institutions responded to a survey designed to determine (1) who teaches business communication, (2) what courses were offered, (3) which departments offered business communication courses, (4) class sizes, (5) number of assignments given, (6) number of instructors involved in publishing and consulting, and (7) the qualifications of business communication instructors. The subjects were chosen randomly from the membership list of the American Business Communication Association. The findings revealed that most business communication instructors had tenure and were well-established in their careers. Of the sample schools, 54 required undergraduate business majors to take one business communication course, and 18 did not require any courses in business communication. Most business communication courses were offered by the business education departments and the majority of such courses had a class size of more than 30 students. More than half of the respondents reported giving 13 or more assignments a semester in business communication. Sixty of the respondents had published articles in the past three years, and more than half were involved in consulting. Sixty of the subjects had doctorates, largely in business education, and most had ten or more years of teaching experience. (FL)

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WHO IS QUALIFIED TO TEACH BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

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CS206276

WHO IS QUALIFIED TO TEACH BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Business Communication is a growing area. Most schools offer courses in business communication, and AACSB is now emphasizing the importance of the subject.

Business communication is slowly establishing itself as a discipline, yet there are no generally accepted qualifications. Most instructors come to the field by accident.

From the very beginning of our involvement with ABCA we have been impressed with the diversity in the backgrounds of the people who are members of ABCA. Dissertation topics run from literature to education, to business. While we know that one of the reasons why ABCA conventions are so interesting is the fact that members have different backgrounds and many interests, this diversity can also cause problems.

If a department wants to offer a course in consumer behavior, the department hires a marketing professor with a specialization in consumer behavior. If a department needs an 18th century literature specialist, it advertises for the appropriate degree and specialization. In business communications, on the other hand, it is much harder to establish criteria for qualifications since there are almost no doctoral programs in this discipline.

B. Purpose

The research concentrated on written business communication classes. We conducted a survey to find information on the following questions:

Who teaches business communications?

What courses are offered?

Which departments offer business communication courses?

How large are classes?

How many assignments are given in business communication?

How many instructors are involved in publishing and consulting?

What are the qualifications of business communication instructors?

Based on the survey we would like to make some recommendations in the areas of:

ABCA membership

Programs and course offerings

Class size and assignments

Qualifications of business communication instructors

We believe that standard qualifications can be of help in hiring, tenure and promotion decisions. They could also be beneficial in career planning, AACSB accreditation, and the development of a professional identity for business communication.

We would like to emphasize that we are suggesting qualifications for a full academic career at a four-year institution.

C. Method

We took a systematic random sample of ABCA members who teach at 4-year institutions in the U.S. The sample is based on the ABCA membership list of September 1979. Foreign members were left out because the educational systems may be quite different from the U.S. system. The questionnaires were sent to 160 people. Eighty-six people responded. Two of the returns could not be used. Several questionnaires were not complete - not all questions were answered. This study has several limitations. Only ABCA members were contacted, this eliminated many institutions and instructors. We do not know the percentage of business communication instructors who are members of ABCA.

At Illinois State University, for example, out of nine people who teach in the business communication area, only three are members of ABCA.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Experience of Respondents

Table 1. Professional Background of Respondents

Number of years	Number of Responses	
	Total number of years of experience	Years at current institution
0-3	3	11
4-6	7	15
7-10	9	15
More than 10	64	42

The above table shows that 64 people have more than 10 years of teaching experience. Only 10 respondents have less than 7 years of experience. Fifty-seven people have been at their current institutions for more than seven years.

Out of the sample 62 people have tenure, and 35 hold the rank of Associate Professor, 27 are Full Professors.

These findings show that ABCA members are well established in their careers. Based on the sample one can draw the conclusion that ABCA has very few members who are at the beginning of their careers. This is unfortunate because at the beginning the support of ABCA through publications and conferences can be of great help to the new instructor of business communications. We suggest several reasons for the imbalance in membership.

1. Many people come to the area by accident. They don't plan to make a career out of business communications. They teach a course occassionally and therefore see their involvement as temporary.

2. Many new instructors are not aware of ABCA since it is not a "departmental" area like management, marketing etc.

B. Business Communication Programs

Out of our sample only 5 institutions offer a major, 3 are planning a major, whereas 73 institutions do not offer a full program. Nine institutions offer a minor in the area.

While the number of programs seems to be increasing, it is probably unlikely that a majority of schools will offer majors in business communications. The field is perceived as a service to the business functions or as a useful supplement.

C. Course Offerings

Of our sample 54 institutions require undergraduate business majors to take one business communication course. Ten institutions require two courses; eighteen institutions do not require a course in business communication.

The following is a list of courses required.

Table II. Titles of Required Courses in Business Communication

Title*	Number of institutions requiring the course
Business Communication (Correspondence)	48
Oral Communication	3
Report Writing	7
Techrical Writing	2
Administrative Communication	1
Information Writing	1
Leadership & Management Communication	1
Principles of Communication	1
Organizational Communication	1

*Not all respondents listed the titles of required courses.

It is no surprise that most institutions require the "basic" course, Business Communications.

We were interested what kind of business communication courses the various institutions offer. It was obvious from the remarks that many respondents did not list all courses offered by their institutions which could be classified as business communication courses but only those they were familiar with.

The sample of titles listed is interesting. It seems there are several standard courses which are offered by a majority of the institutions, and then there are the more adventuresome courses. For people who would like to expand their offerings and are looking for new ideas, this list might be helpful.

Table III. Titles of Business Communication Courses

Titles	Number of institutions offering this course
Business Communication	77
Technical Writing	39
Report Writing	38
Research Writing	27
Oral Business Communication	23
Supervisory Communications	13
Organizational Communication	5
Advanced Business Communication	4
Administrative Communication	3
Interpersonal Communication	2
Communication Problems in Management	2
Legal Writing	2
Employment Communication	1
Organizational Communication	1
Business Writing	1
Principles of Communication	1
Leadership and Management Communication	1
Executive Communication	1

D. Departments Involved in Teaching Business Communication

The following table provides a detailed breakdown where business communications courses are taught. Again, not everybody answered all the questions. This, for example, is the reason that we have 77 respondents list Business Communication as a course title but based on the following table only 68 departments offer the course. We do not believe that the results would be significantly altered by complete questionnaire answers.

Table IV Departments Teaching Business Communication Courses

Courses	Departments									
	Business Education	Office Administration	Business	Management	Business Communication	Communications	Human Resources	English	Total Number of Times Offered	Number of Times Offered in Business Area
Business Communication	30	3	16	5	1	2	1	10	68	55
Report Writing	18	1	8	1	1	2	-	5	36	29
Technical Writing	1	-	2	1	1	3	-	16	24	5
Oral Communication	5	-	1	-	1	2	1	2	17	7
Research Writing	5	3	4	1	1	1	-	3	18	14
Supervisory Communication	1	-	3	-	1	1	-	2	8	5
Organizational Communication	2	-	1	2	-	-	1	-	6	5
Administrative Communication	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Administrative Writing	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	1
Executive Communication	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Business Writing	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Advanced Business Communication	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Employment Communication	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Principles of Communication	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Leadership and Management Communication	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-

As the table shows Business Education teaches by far most of the courses. This is particularly true for Business Communication and Report Writing. It seems where business is not divided into departments, the general Business Department teaches the courses.

The cases where Management Departments teach Business Communication, Report Writing, Technical Writing might be explained by the fact that a number of Business Colleges do not have a Business Education Department any more, therefore another department took over that function.

Office Administration Departments often are an outgrowth of Business Education Departmetns. Communication Departments seem to gradually get into the area of business communication.

The only area where English is leading is in Technical Writing.

Based on our sample most business communication courses are taught in the business area.

E. Class Size

We had hoped this survey would show that only Illinois State University had business communication courses in excess of 15 students, and as a result of this survey, we might be able to reduce our classes. Unfortunately this was not to be.

In 33 cases business communication classes have more than 35 students, the majority has more than 30 students enrolled in those classes. The lower enrollments (up to 19) tended to come from English Departments.

Report Writing fared somewhat better. The majority of the report writing classes are under 30 students with the average being in the 25-29 range.

Table V. Class Size

Number of Students	Number of Institutions	
	Business Communications	Report Writing
Under 15	3	1
15 - 19	2	2
20 - 24	8	10
25 - 29	19	13
30 - 34	19	7
35 or more	33	9

The above finding is particularly interesting in connection with the number of assignments given. More than 50% give more than 13 assignments in Business Communications. In only 9 cases were there fewer than 10. Based on this sample we suggest that instructors with fewer than 10 assignments re-evaluate the requirements they set. On the other hand one wonders about the workload considering that the majority of the classes have more than 30 students, and the instructor requires at least 13 assignments. With two sections of business communications a semester - and many teach 4 sections - this comes to 690 papers a semester.

In Report Writing there is no clear pattern for assignments. An evaluation in this case is more difficult because the numbers do not indicate how complex or long the reports are.

F. Graduate Business Communications

About 70% of our sample have a graduate business program. 50% of the respondents indicated that business communication courses were available for graduate credit but only about 15% require a business communication class in their graduate business program. There is obviously much room for expansion in this area.

G. Publications and Consulting

Of our sample, 60 people published 184 articles during the last three years and slightly over half of those (106) were in the area of business communications. More than half the sample is involved in consulting or in house training.

Based on these findings one can draw the conclusion that business communication professors belonging to ABCA are demanding in class and active in professional development and research.

Table VI. Publications during last 3 years

Number of articles published	Total number of people publishing	Number of people publishing in business communications
0	25	
1	16	16
2	14	11
3	7	6
4	6	4
5	7	3
6	4	2
more than 6	8	1

H. Qualifications

We asked respondents to indicate their academic backgrounds as undergraduates and graduates, both at the masters and doctorate level. Out of 84 people, 60 had a doctorate.

As pointed out before, in most cases business communication courses are taught in Business Education Departments. It is therefore not surprising that more than 50% had their doctorates in Business Education or related areas (32 in Business Education, 2 in Secretarial Education.)

If one includes other business areas, the figures show that 40 out of 60 have doctorates in business. These people have a good business background to teach business communication. The second single largest area is English. Eleven people have doctorates in English (8 in English, 2 in Comparative Literature, one in Rhethoric). They have a solid background in language.

Not surprisingly, the business people do not have special preparation in language arts, and the English people do not have any business.

Five of the people with English backgrounds teach in Business Education Departments. Not one person with a business background is teaching business communication in an English Department. On the whole, people seem to be hired into departments for which they have the proper paper qualifications. The question that comes up is whether there are criteria that can be set up

for qualifications in business communications. Very often instructors with English backgrounds teach business communication because that is where the opening was. Often people with business education backgrounds teach business communication because, as part of typing, they always taught business correspondence. The problem is that a literature background and language skills are not substitutes for business knowledge. A business background on the other hand is not enough either. What is needed for effective business communication instruction is a synthesis of these two areas; language skills, analytical and critical thinking, and a knowledge of business.

Most ABCA members have acquired these qualifications through experience. Yet it would be desirable to formalize the qualifications more specifically since AACSB is emphasizing business communication as a requirement for accreditation.

Table VII Academic Backgrounds of Business Communication Instructors

	Number of People at the Three Levels		
Areas	Bachelor	Masters	Doctorate
Accounting	2		
Adult Education			1
Business Administration	13	10 MBA	2
Business Economics	1		
Business Education	30	38	32
Communication	1	2	5
Curriculum and Instruction			1
Education	1	3	1
Educational Administration	1		
Educational Psychology	1	1	1
Electrical Engineering	1		
English	15	15	10
Finance	1		
Government	1		
Industrial Psychology			1
Journalism	1	1	
Linguistics		2	
Management	3	2	2
Marketing	1		1
Mathematics	1		1
Personnel			1
Philosophy	1		
Public Relations	1		
Secretarial Education	1	1	2
Speech Communication	2	1	

A. Experience of Respondents

As pointed out before, the survey indicates that most ABCA members have many years of experience and that few beginning instructors join. This may be due to the fact that many people come to the discipline by accident.

ABCA would do well on recruiting those who are just getting into business communications. A drive might also be conducted among graduate students who are interested in teaching in the area of business communications. This might help to create a stronger professional identity for the area.

B. Programs and Course Offerings

Most institutions teach the traditional courses: Business Communications, Report Writing, Technical Writing, however, the offerings are growing as the variety of course titles suggests. There is room for development at the graduate level.

C. Class Size and Assignments

Classes are too large at most institutions. Standards are high in terms of numbers of assignments.

We recommend that instructors with classes of over 35 students use the results of this survey to try and reduce class size.

D. Qualifications

It is doubtful that many business communication instructors planned a career in this field when they were undergraduate or even graduate students. While some programs are being developed in the area, most business communication instructors come from and will continue to come from a variety of backgrounds.

This diversity can give the discipline strength. However, when a person has to prove that he/she is qualified to be hired, to get promotion, tenure, and recognition, the lack of standard qualifications can be a burden.

The survey indicates that hiring decisions may not be based primarily on a person's ability to teach business communication but rather on the traditional qualifications for that department - English literature, Business education subjects.

To help business communication establish itself as a discipline and to assist instructors to establish themselves as fully qualified professionals, ABCA should set some basic standards for the teaching of business communications. Given the desireability of diversity and given the fact that hardly any institution offers a doctorate in business communication, there should be more than one way to qualify.

In order to be an effective business communication instructor a person has to have an awareness of and a sensitivity to language, acquired through the study of English, and a knowledge of business. Both elements are necessary and full certification should take this into account.

In the academic world - for better or worse - the doctorate is the basis for qualification, therefore any standard has to include the doctorate. We know that people can be excellent teachers and well qualified to teach business communication courses. A number of instructors have years of experience in business to bring to the classroom. As pointed out before, we are making recommendations for full-time academic careers.

We suggest the following three backgrounds and recommend that a person with a background in any one of the areas be considered fully qualified.

1. Doctorate in English plus 15 hours of business courses or five years plus of experience (experience of teaching in the area of business communication at least half time, or appropriate business experience). The 15 hours were not set accidentally. They would provide a person with a basic background in Management, Marketing, Accounting, Finance and Business Law.

2. Doctorate in a Business area plus 15 hours of writing courses or five years of experience.
3. Doctorate plus 30 hours, 15 of those in writing and 15 in business or 8 years of experience.

The above three possibilities keep the diversity the discipline now has, at the same time the importance of business and language are recognized. Also, as is the case currently, one can become fully qualified through experience.

Appendix

Illinois State University
College of Business
Department of Business Education
and Administrative Services

January 21, 1980

Dear ABCA Member:

Have you ever wondered how large business communication classes are at other institutions?

Are you frustrated because the class size of Report Writing was raised from 25-33 students over the last year?

Have you ever worried or are you worrying more about promotion or tenure in your department because some people feel you are not truly "qualified" for that department?

Who is teaching business communications? What courses do other institutions offer? . . . . . .

The purpose of this survey is to obtain statistics on the academic background of business communication instructors, on business communication programs, and class size. The survey is limited to four year institutions.

The result will help you in requesting that your class size not be above the average at other institutions. When it comes to tenure and promotion it may help you in showing that business communication instructors come from many different areas and teach in many different departments.

Please take a few minutes to fill in the enclosed questionnaire and return it to us using the mailing label.

Sincerely,

Iris I. Varner

Carson H. Varner

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Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action University

SURVEY OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

Instructions: Circle the appropriate answer or fill in if other is appropriate.

1. Is your institution
   a. public?
   b. private?

2. What type of institution?
   a. 4 year undergrad
   b. 4 year undergrad plus masters
   c. 4 year undergrad, plus masters, plus doctoral

3. How many students attend your institution?
   a. Under 3,000
   b. 3,000 - 9,999
   c. 10,000 - 14,999
   d. 15,000 - 19,999
   e. 20,000 or more

4. If your institution is divided into colleges, in which college do you teach?
   a. Business
   b. Arts and Science
   c. Education
   d. Other _____
      (please specify)

5. In which department do you teach?
   a. English
   b. Business Education
   c. Business (all business disciplines in one department)
   d. Management
   e. Business Communications
   f. Communications (Information Sciences)
   g. Other_____
      (please specify)

6. How many business majors attend your university?
   a. Under 100
   b. 100 - 499
   c. 500 - 999
   d. 1,000 - 1,999
   e. 2,000 or more

7. What is your educational background?

	Degree	
Undergraduate	_____	Major_____ Minor_____
Masters	_____	Major_____ Minor/or Supporting Field _____
Post. Masters No. of hours _____ OR		Major_____ Minor/or Supporting Field _____

Doctoral _____ Major_____
Minor/or Supporting Field
_____

Dissertation Title_____

8. Years of teaching experience
   a. 0 - 3
   b. 4 - 6
   c. 7 - 10
   d. More than 10

9. Years of teaching at current institution.
   a. 0 - 3
   b. 4 - 6
   c. 7 - 10
   d. More than 10

10. Do you have tenure?
    a. Yes
    b. No

11. What is your current rank?
    a. Instructor
    b. Assistant Professor
    c. Associate Professor
    d. Full Professor
    e. Other_____

12. Does your institution have a business communications program as
    1. Business Communications major?
       a. Yes
       b. No
       c. In planning
    2. Business Communications Minor
       a. Yes
       b. No
       c. In planning
    3. Other type of program _____
       (please specify)

13. How many business communication courses does your institution require undergraduate business majors to take?
    a. 0
    b. 1
    c. 2
    d. More than 2
    Please list titles of required business communication courses
    _____ _____
    _____ _____

14. What business communications courses does your university offer?

Yes	No	1.	Basic Business Communications
Yes	No	2.	Report Writing
Yes	No	3.	Technical Writing
Yes	No	4.	Legal Writing
Yes	No	5.	Research Writing
Yes	No	6.	Oral Business Communications
Yes	No	7.	Supervisory Communications
		8.	Other _____ (please specify)

15. How many of the above courses are offered in your department?
    a. All
    b. 1
    c. 2
    d. 3
    e. 4

16. What is the maximum class size in your basic business communications course?
    a. Less than 15
    b. 15 - 19
    c. 20 - 24
    d. 25 - 29
    e. 30 - 34
    f. 35 or more

17. What is the maximum class size in your report writing class?
    a. Less than 15
    b. 15 - 19
    c. 20 - 24
    d. 25 - 29
    e. 30 - 34
    f. 35 or more

18. Does your institution have a graduate business program?
    a. Yes
    b. No

19. Are business communications courses available for graduate credit?
    a. Yes
    b. No

20. Is a business communications class required in your graduate business program?
    a. Yes
    b. No

21. How many written assignments (in and out of class) do you give in basic business communications course. (circle the appropriate)
    1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 or more, do not teach basic business communications

22. How many written assignments do you give in Report Writing?
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 or more, do not teach report writing

23. Do you require a long report in Report Writing?
a. Yes
b. No

24. What is the normal full-time teaching load at your institution?
a. 0 - 6
b. 7 - 9
c. 10 - 12
d. 13 or more

25. How many publications have you had in the past three years?
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, more than 6

26. How many in the area of business communications?
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, more than 6

27. Are you involved in consulting or in house training?
a. Yes
b. No

28. If the answer to question 27 is yes, then how many times a year?
a. 1 - 2
b. 3 - 4
c. 5 - 6
d. More than 6